

REMARKS

Claims 18-21 are pending in this application and claims 18-21 are rejected. In view of the following remarks, reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested.

I. Rejection under 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph

The Office Action rejects claims 18-21, alleging that the claims do not satisfy the written description requirement of 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph. Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection.

Claims 18-21 are directed to a method for manufacturing a formed headliner for a vehicle that includes bonding an air-permeable top cover member to a non-air-permeable base member and discharging air between the top cover member and the base member only through the top cover member. The Office Action states that it is unclear where in the specification the base member is described as "non-air-permeable" and where it is disclosed that air is "discharged only through the top cover member." The specification describes all of the elements of the claimed method for the following reasons.

A. The specification discloses a non-air permeable base member

From reading the specification, one of ordinary skill in the art would easily recognize that the claimed base member is non-air-permeable. The Description of Related Art section of the specification describes a vehicle lining that includes a top cover member bonded to a multi-layered base member. In particular, the related art describes a top cover member having a top cover, a polyurethane foam and a nylon fabric, and a multi-layer base member having a hot melt film, a polyamide film, a polypropylene film, a base material, and a non-woven fabric (see, page 1, line 21, to page 2, line 2). For improved adhesive strength, the top cover member can also include a hot melt film (see, page 3, line 8-9). However, as detailed in the specification, including a hot melt film on the top cover member results in trapped air between the base member and the top cover member (see, page 3, lines 10-12 and September

15, 2002 Amendment to the specification). Thus, it is well established in the art that a hot melt film eliminates air permeability.

The specification teaches that adding a hot-melt film to the top cover member results in trapped air. The art recognizes that when a hot melt film is included on both the top cover member and the base member, air becomes trapped between the members. The specification teaches that taking an air-permeable top cover member and adding a hot melt film removes the top cover member's air permeability.

While a hot melt film alone is enough to destroy air permeability, Applicants disclose a base layer that includes, in addition to the hot melt film (which itself is known to be non-air-permeable), several more layers such as, a polyamide film, a polypropylene film, a base material, and a non-woven fabric (see page 8 and Fig. 1). Most or all of these layers can further eliminate air-permeability. For instance, the specification discloses that the polyamide film prevents ventilation, i.e., air-permeability, through the base layer (see, page 8, lines 18-19). The base layer further includes a base material comprising thermoplastic resin, i.e., glass fiber and polypropylene (see, page 8, lines 20-22). One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize that a base member that includes at least three non-air permeable layers (a hot melt film plus a polyamide film plus a thermoplastic resin base) would likewise be a non-air-permeable base member. Thus, the specification does describe a "non-air permeable" base member.

B. The specification discloses air discharged only through the top cover member

The specification describes the problems associated with trapped air and poor adhesion between the bonded top cover and base members of the headliner. Applicants' solution includes a method for producing an air-permeable top cover that allows all of the trapped air to escape while maintaining strong adhesion between the bonded members. One

aspect of their method of maintaining an air-permeable top cover includes the application of a hot melt adhesive in a pattern to the back of the top cover. A second aspect includes the application of a hot melt film to the top of the base member and the use of heat during the bonding step.

As recognized in the Office Action, the specification teaches that air trapped during bonding between the top cover member and base member is discharged through the top cover member. Moreover, the specification also teaches that air is discharged only through the top cover member. As detailed in the above remarks, the specification teaches that air does not escape through the non-air permeable base member. The specification also teaches that air does not escape in the transverse direction (i.e., through the sides) of the laminate.

Beginning at page 9, the specification discloses a method for forming a lining with reference to Figs. 2A and 2B. The method includes setting the base member (20) into base member clamps (13), and setting the top cover member (10) into top cover clamps (14). Both clamped members are then set between dies of a press forming machine where the two are pressed, bonded, and formed into the product shape. Under this method, the air between the top cover member and the base member is easily discharged through the top cover member (see, page 11, lines 5-8). One of ordinary skill in the art would understand that air does not escape in the transverse direction.

First, as detailed in the above remarks, the method is particularly designed to allow air to easily escape through the top cover member. Second, the method teaches that base member and top cover clamps (13 & 14) are affixed to the sides of each respective member. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize that these clamps eliminate air flow through the sides of the laminate. During the pressing operation, air does not escape in the transverse direction. Air can escape in only one direction, through the top cover member. Thus, the specification does disclose that air is discharged only through the top cover member.

For at least these reasons, the specification discloses all of the elements of the claimed subject matter in such a way as to reasonably convey to one of ordinary skill in the art that the inventors had possession of the claimed invention. Claims 18-21 fully satisfy the requirements of 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection.

II. Rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103(a)

The Office Action maintains a rejection of claims 18-21 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over the alleged prior art described in the specification in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,190,482 to Colasanto, U.S. Patent No. 5,750,444 to Jarrell et al., U.S. Patent No. 3,850,725 to Spielau et al., and U.S. Patent No. 5,539,072 to Wu.. Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection.

Claims 18-21 are directed to a method for manufacturing a formed headliner for a vehicle that includes bonding a top cover member to a non-air permeable base member, wherein trapped air is discharged only through the top cover member. The Office Action acknowledges that the cited references do not teach or suggest the discharge of air only through the top cover member as claimed.

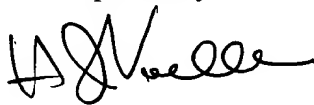
As detailed in the above remarks, because all elements of claims 18-21 are fully supported by the specification, and because the cited references do not teach or suggest the method as claimed, the rejection must be withdrawn. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection.

III. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of claims 18-21 are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



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